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ABSTRACT

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a coalition of educators, business leaders, governors and policymakers seeking comprehensive and lasting improvement in education in the five southeastern states. SERVEing Young Children is the early childhood project within SERVE. The first section of this resource booklet introduces the project, which focuses on the transitions children make from home, preschool, or child care into elementary school. The second section describes the mission and goals of the project; lists information and services provided by and activities conducted by the project; and identifies issues that are important in strengthening transitions. The third section lists practices that schools have used in the past to foster transitions, practices that can be used in the future, and barriers to successful transitions. A checklist of elements that should be found in effective transitions programs is presented in the fourth section. The fifth section consists of three selected readings: (1) an ERIC digest on school readiness; (2) an ERIC digest on transitions; and (3) the final report of a national study on transitions to kindergarten in American schools. A list of 29 suggested readings and a 9-item bibliography are presented in the final two sections. (BC)

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A Resource Booklet on TRANSITIONS

SERVEing Young Children Project

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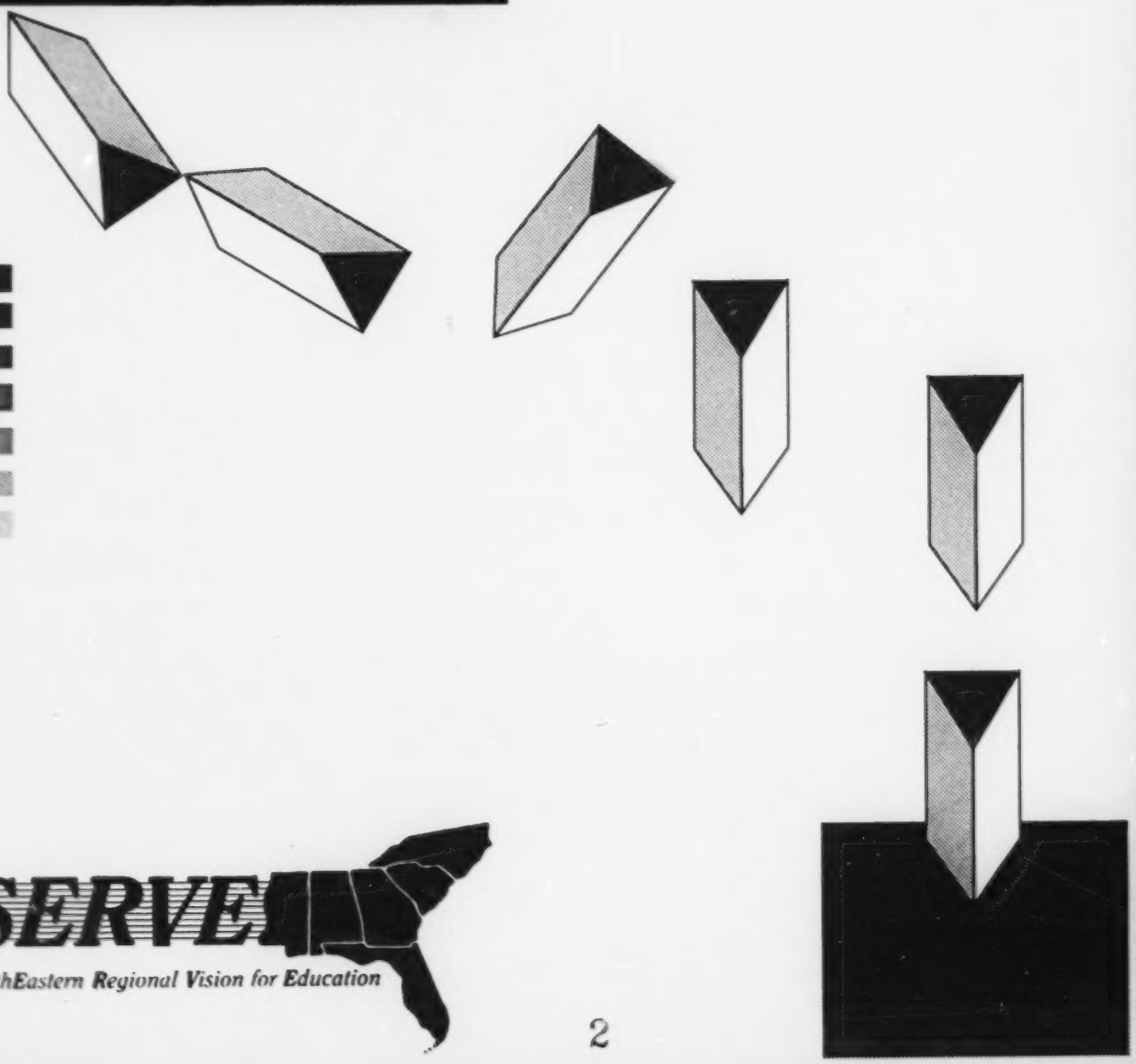

SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

A Resource Booklet
on

TRANSITIONS

SERVEing Young Children

A Preschool-to-School Transition Project

SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

Affiliated with the

School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
and the
Florida Department of Education

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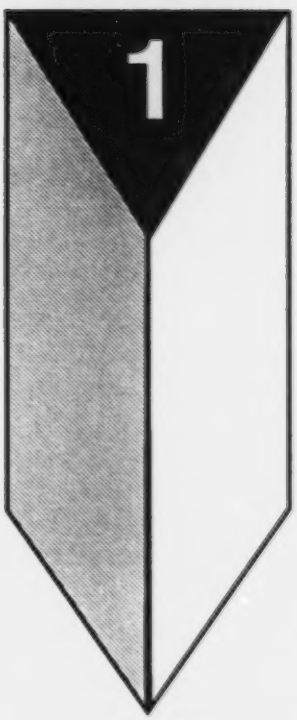
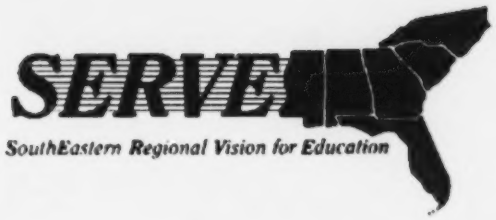
INTRODUCTION





SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a coalition of educators, business leaders, governors, and policymakers seeking comprehensive and lasting improvement in education in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The name of the laboratory reflects a commitment to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast. Funded by the U. S. Department of Education, the laboratory's mission is to provide leadership, support, and research to assist state and local efforts in improving educational outcomes, especially for at-risk and rural students.

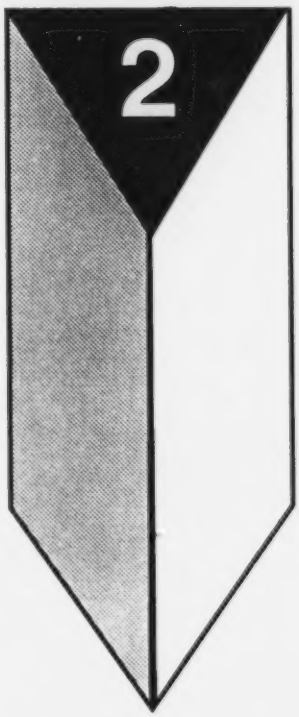
SERVEing Young Children is the early childhood project within SERVE. This project focuses on the transitions children make from home, preschool, or child care into early elementary school. Much discussion has taken place among early childhood educators who are looking at the way in which children enter the public school system. The discussion includes concern about each child's preparation for school as well as schools' perceptions of each child's readiness. Many questions are being asked: "What is readiness?" "How do we respect and accept what every child has to offer and still meet school district or state curriculum guidelines?" "How do we sustain gains made in preschool by students considered at-risk for school failure once they enter kindergarten?" "How do we sustain parent involvement that is initiated and cultivated at the preschool level?" "How can preschool teachers, child-care providers, and elementary school teachers work together more closely?" In grappling with these issues, expressions of confusion about what the word "transition" really means and who is responsible for ensuring that children experience a smooth transition have begun to emerge.

A Resource Booklet on Transitions provides information to educators who are interested in clarifying transition issues. The booklet gives an overview of SERVEing Young Children's activities, defines transitions, and delineates the issues to address in creating a transition plan. The booklet can be especially helpful to educators interested in creating partnerships among child-care providers, preschool teachers and directors, and those who work at elementary schools.

For more information about SERVE, SERVEing Young Children, and the laboratory's products and services, contact Nancy Livesay, Project Director, at the address below.

SERVE
345 South Magnolia Drive
Suite D-23
Tallahassee, FL 32301-2950
(904) 922-2300 or (800) 352-6001

Mission and Goals of SERVEing Young Children



SERVEing Young Children

A Preschool to School Transition Project

MISSION AND GOALS

Among the education goals the President and the Governors established for the nation is— "All children in America will start school ready to learn." Achieving school readiness is a complex task because we must help children be ready for school and schools be ready for children. Home environments and preschool experiences and opportunities vary widely. Elementary schools must be prepared to teach a diverse group of children and meet their varied developmental needs.

The purpose of SERVEing Young Children is to strengthen the transition and linkages between prekindergarten and early elementary school to enhance services to young children and improve student success.

INFORMATION, SERVICES, AND ACTIVITIES

WHAT IS SERVEing YOUNG CHILDREN?

This project is a major initiative of the SERVE laboratory focusing on serving the interests of young children by enhancing collaboration and communication among early childhood stakeholders.

WHAT DOES SERVEing YOUNG CHILDREN DO?

Activities include convening groups, sharing exemplary practices and programs, conducting and synthesizing research, developing and disseminating materials, working with universities to enhance preservice education, and providing or brokering technical assistance.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO STRENGTHEN LINKAGES AND IMPROVE TRANSITION?

Strengthening linkages and improving transitions will

- eliminate fragmentation and provide continuity of services to children,
- increase support to families as partners in educating children,
- encourage collaboration and communication among early childhood stakeholders,
- sustain the benefits of early intervention,
- address the benefits of early intervention,
- attack increasingly complex social problems, and
- result in improved educational outcomes.

WHAT ARE TRANSITIONS AND LINKAGES?

Transitions and linkages refer to experiences and activities that support or enhance continuity of comprehensive services to children and their families. Historically, these services have been fragmented, overlapping, or disconnected. Better integration of efforts is essential.

WHO CAN ACCESS THE SERVICES?

Anyone within the region served by the laboratory (the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina) with an interest in the welfare of young children can utilize the services provided by contacting SERVEing Young Children at the address below.

345 S. Magnolia Drive, Suite D-23
Tallahassee, FL 32301
(904) 922-2276 or (800) 352-6001

"SERVEing Young Children"

SERVEing Young Children works to improve transitions and linkages between pre-kindergarten (early childhood) and early elementary school by coordinating and enhancing efforts of all agencies that serve young children.

"SERVEing Young Children" will . . .

Participate in a national policy symposium
Cooperate with Office of Educational Research and Improvement and the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families in jointly planning an annual national invitational symposium to highlight policy issues of national interest in building transitions for young children.

Conduct a regional symposium
Host an annual invitational regional symposium to assess and address the regional needs in strengthening linkages in early childhood education. Topics to be discussed include those issues emerging from the national symposium and other issues identified as critical to the region.

Seek advice and guidance from a regional early childhood advisory council

Identify promising practices and programs in the area of preschool-to-school transition
Sponsor a Sharing Success program to recognize and share successful transition practices.

Produce articles for publication
Target publications for submission of articles to enhance awareness of early childhood issues.

Produce and disseminate *Hot Topics* publications
Conduct research and gather information for the development of publications on topics of interest in the area of early childhood education.

Work with universities and community colleges

Provide technical assistance upon request

Provide or broker training, information, and materials

Prepare research and policy briefs on early childhood issues

The following issues have been identified as important in strengthening linkages and transitions in the Southeast:

Collaboration and Communication
Work with corporations, Head Start, interagency councils, HRS, Chapter 1, etc.

Multicultural Influences
Continue support of ESOL, and meet the needs of students considered at risk for school failure, including those from rural areas and minority students.

Family-Sensitive Personnel Policies
Promote schools at the work site, and encourage corporate personnel procedures and policies that support family involvement.

Caregiver Preparation
Collaborate with community colleges and universities regarding training and credentialing.

Family Involvement
Promote parent/family education and training, literacy in the home, and issues involving the homeless, hard-to-reach, and cultural diversity.

Pupil Progression
Encourage discussions about developmentally appropriate curricula, technology in the classroom, transition classes, retention, non-graded advancement, at-risk factors, assessment of young children, and transmittal of information.

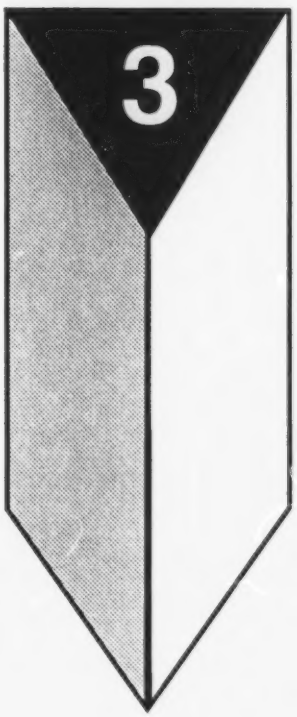
Substance-Exposed Children
Support continued research on the needs of babies and children prenatally exposed to drugs and with fetal alcohol syndrome.

Program Cost and Funding

Preservice
Work with universities, colleges, and community colleges on preparation programs for early childhood educators.

Model Programs
Identify and share information about successful programs or practices supported by research.

What Are Transitions?



WHAT ARE TRANSITIONS?

Transitions refer to experiences and activities that support or enhance continuity of comprehensive services to children and their families.

HISTORICALLY, HERE IS WHAT WE HAVE DONE . . .

Schools have involved preschool children, their families, and teachers in activities during the year prior to their enrollment in school

- school visitations
- lunch invitations
- parent/teacher conferences
- evening orientations

Formal coordination plans have been established between elementary schools and head start or other preschool programs designed to communicate information about the school, to the family, and about the child to the school

- transfer of records
- contact person
- annual meetings

Schools have worked with outside agencies to develop support services for needy families

- referral system with parental responsibility and institutional support if needed

Teachers have consulted with families in the planning of developmentally appropriate curriculum

- National Association for the Education of Young Children and Southern Early Childhood Association leadership
- district-level interagency communication
- little communication outside of the school family

WE CAN DO MORE . . .

Transitions . . .Why are they important?

- there is a need for improved collaboration among all stakeholders
- there is a need for increased involvement of families as partners in educating the child
- research supports early intervention for improved social and educational outcomes
- increasingly complex social problems confront young children and require attention
- we need to eliminate fragmentation and duplication of services to young children

WHAT ARE BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS?

- a tradition of separateness
- lack of communication or collaboration
- discontinuity factors
- differing philosophies
- lack of "trickle-down"
- lack of appropriate training
- use of funding and resources
- logistics
- structures of the institutions
- "turfism" and attitude problems

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS?

By

- developing a shared vision
- encouraging systemic change
- providing models
- supporting year-round transition models
- providing adequate funding
- using developmentally appropriate practices consistently
- generating longitudinal data to support efforts
- increasing family education and empowerment
- communicating between and among learning environments
- promoting continuity of philosophy, pedagogy, and structure
- advocating for consistent and devoted attention to children's needs
- assisting with strategic planning which includes clear goals, training, and written agreements

HERE IS WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY WE NEED TO DO:

Collaborate . . . "It is best to hold hands and stick together."
Robert Fulghum, *All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, 1986.

"Have both vertical and horizontal transitions."
Sharon Lynn Kagan, *Coming Together: Linking Services for Young Children*, 1990.

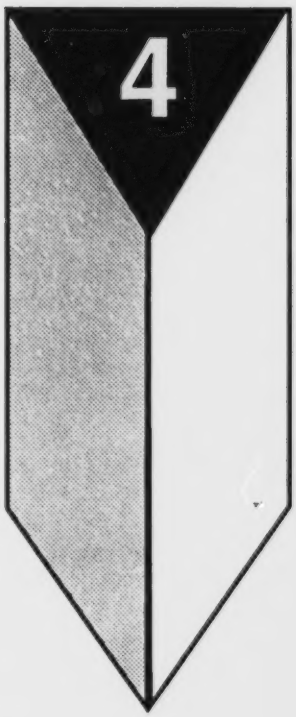
Give every child a healthy and fair start. "Let us leave no child behind."
Marian Wright Edelman, 1992.

Promote the achievement of Goal 1 of the National Education Goals—"By the Year 2000, All Children in America Will Start School Ready to Learn."
President George Bush and the 50 Governors. *America 2000: An Education Strategy*, 1991.

Create caring communities. "A caring community works together to support children and families so that children can enter schools ready to learn."
Heather Weiss. *Caring Communities: Supporting Young Children and Families*, 1991.

Understand that "Readiness is not just an educational issue: it is also a health issue, a social issue, and an economic issue. It involves virtually every aspect of society."
Readiness for School: The Early Childhood Challenge, 1992.

SERVEing Young Children's Transition Checklist

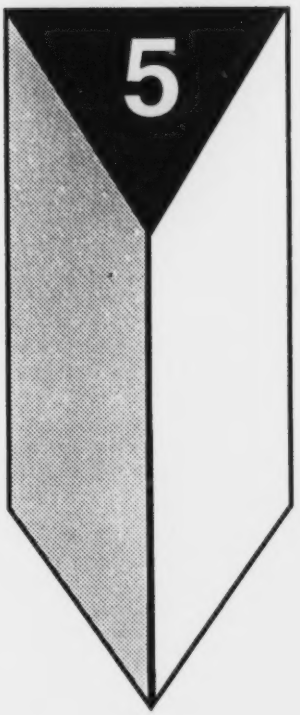


SERVEing Young Children's Transition Checklist: Elements of Transition Programs

Through a review of the available data and research on effective early childhood programs, SERVEing Young Children has developed a conceptual framework for a transition model. This framework consists of 15 elements. Effective transition programs should contain many of the following elements:

- Program continuity in pedagogy, structure, and/or philosophy
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum practices
- A strong family support component—education and/or empowerment
- Communication and collaboration with other service agencies or a plan for accessing services for families
- Complete transfer of records between sites
- Systematic approach to training and support—joint training opportunities for staff
- Focus on the needs of the child
- Adequate staff certification and credentials (early childhood education, Child Development Associate certification, etc.)
- Collocation of, or articulation between, sending and receiving sites
- Developmentally Appropriate Practice screening and assessment practices
- Adequate funding and resources
- Organizational structure which provides strong leadership and/or shared decision making among administrators, teachers, and parents
- Continuous pupil progression (non-retention)
- Comprehensive integrated services
- Sensitivity to cultural differences

Selected Readings on Transitions and School Readiness



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EDO-PS-91-4

Readiness: Children and Schools

Lilian G. Katz

Concern for the readiness of America's children to profit from school experience was expressed by the President of the United States and the National Governors' Association at their summit meeting in February, 1990. The first of six educational goals outlined at the meeting was that "all children will start school ready to learn" by the year 2000. Three objectives emerged from discussion of ways to achieve this goal. Communities and schools must:

- provide disadvantaged and disabled children with access to high quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs designed to help prepare them for school.
- recognize that parents are children's first teachers and encourage them to spend time daily to help their preschool children learn; provide parents with training and support.
- enhance prenatal health systems to reduce the number of low birthweight babies; ensure that children receive the nutrition and health care they need to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.

The Concept of Readiness

Consideration of the readiness goal and the more precise objectives raises questions about the concept of readiness and its meaning to policymakers and educators. This concept has been debated for more than a century (Kagan, 1990). The main issue debated is the extent to which development and learning are determined by the biological processes involved in growth versus the experiences children have with parents, peers, and their environments. Those who emphasize internal developmental processes believe that the passage of time during which growth occurs renders the child more or less able to benefit from formal instruction. Those who emphasize experience take the position that virtually all human beings are born with a powerful built-in disposition to learn and that inherent growth processes and experience both contribute to children's learning.

The quantity and rate of learning in the first few years of life are nothing short of spectacular. The fact that by three or four years of age, most children can understand and use the language of those around them is just one example of learning that takes place long before children begin school.

However, what children learn, how they learn, and how much they learn depend on many factors. Among the most important factors are the child's physical well-being, and his emotional and cognitive relationships with those who care for him. The school readiness goal reflects two concerns about the education of young children. The first is that increasing numbers of young children live in poverty, in single-parent households, have limited proficiency in English, are affected by the drug abuse of their parents, have poor nutrition, and receive inadequate health care.

The second area of concern involves such matters as the high rates of retention in kindergarten and the primary grades, delayed school entry in some districts, segregated transition classes in others, and the increasing use of standardized tests to determine children's readiness to enter school. Standardized tests used to deny children entrance to school or place them in special classes are inappropriate for children younger than six. These trends are due largely to the fact that an academic curriculum and direct instruction teaching practices that are appropriate for the upper grades have gradually been moved down into the kindergarten and first grade.

These two areas of concern suggest that reaching the school readiness goal will require a twofold strategy: one part focused on supporting families in their efforts to help their children get ready for school, and the second on helping the schools to be responsive to the wide range of developmental levels, backgrounds, experiences, and needs children bring to school with them.

Getting Children Ready for School

The term *readiness* is commonly used to mean *readiness to learn to read*. However, children's general social development and intellectual backgrounds should also be taken into account in any consideration of ways to help children prepare for school.

- *Social readiness.* Children are more likely to cope successfully with their first school experience if they have had positive experience in being in a group away from their home and familiar adults. Young children can approach new relationships with confidence if they have already had some positive experience in accepting authority from adults outside of their family. They are also more likely to adjust easily to school life if they have experienced satisfying interaction with a group of peers and have thereby acquired such social skills as taking turns, making compromises, and approaching unfamiliar children. Parents and preschool teachers can contribute to social readiness by offering children positive experiences in group settings outside of the home, and by helping children strengthen their social skills and understanding (Katz & McClellan).

- *Intellectual readiness.* Children are more likely to feel competent in school if they can understand and use the language of the peers and the adults they meet in school. They are also more likely to have confidence in their own ability to cope with school if they can relate to the ideas and topics introduced by the teacher and other children in class discussion and activities.

  Parents and preschool teachers can strengthen intellectual preparedness by providing children ample opportunity for conversation, discussion, and cooperative work and play with peers who are likely to start school with them. Parents of children not enrolled in a preschool program can help by talking to the staff at the child's future school about the kinds of stories, songs, and special activities and field trips usually offered at the school, and by introducing related topics to their children.

Getting the School Ready for the Children

The most important strategy for addressing the school readiness goal is to prepare the school to be responsive to the wide range of experiences, backgrounds and needs of the children who are starting school.

- *Appropriate curriculum.* A position statement on school readiness issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1990) points out that, given the nature of children's development, "the curriculum in the early grades must provide meaningful contexts for children's learning rather than focusing primarily on isolated skill acquisitions" (p.22). The curriculum should emphasize informal work and play, a wide range of activities related to the children's direct, firsthand experience, ample opportunity to apply skills being learned in meaningful contexts, and a wide variety of teaching methods.

- *Appropriate staffing.* Teachers are more likely to be able to accommodate the diversity of experiences, backgrounds, languages, and interests of their pupils if their classes are small, or if they have the services of a qualified full-time aide. Having two adults in each class makes it easier to staff classes with speakers of more than one language. Small child/staff ratios provide teachers with the opportunity to spend unhurried time with every child, to address each child's unique needs, and to develop good relationships with parents.

- *Age considerations.* The National Association for the Education of Young Children's Position Statement on School Readiness points out that contrary to what is commonly assumed, there are no tests by which to determine reliably whether a child is "ready" to begin school. "Therefore, the only legally and ethically defensible criterion for determining school entry is whether the child has reached the legal chronological age of school entry" (p.22). Some schools and districts are experimenting with mixed-age grouping as a way of reducing grade retention rates, and encouraging children to help each other in all areas of learning (Katz, and others, 1990).

Realizing the goal of having all our children ready for school and all our schools ready for the children by the year 2000 will require the best efforts of all involved: parents, teachers, administrators and everyone in the community who has a stake in the welfare of its children. And that's just about everybody!

For More Information

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EDO-PS-92-3

Beyond Transition: Ensuring Continuity in Early Childhood Services

Joan Lombardi

In the early childhood field, the word *transition* is used in many different ways. Traditionally, *transition* has been used to describe the period of time that falls between two different types of activities. *Transition* may also be used to describe the time period in which children move from home to school, from school to after-school activities, from one activity to another within a preschool, or from preschool to kindergarten. In each case, early childhood professionals have been concerned with easing the transition between two different types of activities or environments.

Continuity: A Concept Revisited

With more and more children participating in early childhood programs before they enter school, there is an increasing focus on the transition that occurs when children move from preschool to kindergarten. Many children have problems adjusting to elementary school programs that have a different philosophy, teaching style, and structure than those programs in which they participated during their earlier years. Transition efforts were designed to help ease the entry into school by preparing both children and families for the differences children will encounter.

But more recently, there has been a growing consensus that the key to effective services for young children is less through bridging the gap between different types of programs, and more through ensuring continuity in certain key elements that characterize all good early childhood programs. This notion of continuity is not new. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, efforts such as Project Developmental Continuity and Follow-Through were designed to ensure that the principles of good early childhood programs continued into the early years of elementary school. But today's concept of continuity has changed in several respects. First, there is now much more consensus in the field regarding what constitutes appropriate practice in all types of early childhood programs from infancy through the primary grades. There is also growing recognition that parent involvement is a key to a child's success and should be encouraged as children move on to elementary school. Finally, the need for supportive services for both children and families has intensified. Comprehensive family support and health services are critical components throughout the early years.

Towards Continuity: Three Key Elements

If programs are to provide effective early childhood services throughout children's early years, they must share at least three characteristics: developmentally appropriate practice, parent involvement, and supportive services for children and families.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Continuity across early childhood services is facilitated by the degree to which all programs are developmentally appropriate. Naturally, the setting, age range, and abilities of the children will differ across programs. As children progress from preschool to kindergarten and on to the primary grades, they show increased motor and language skills, they can pay attention longer, they can play more cooperatively, and they are more able to develop interests that go beyond their immediate surroundings. Throughout the preschool and early elementary years, children learn best through active exploration of their environment and through interactions with adults, other children, and concrete materials that build on earlier experiences.

Programs for young children should not be seen as either play-oriented or academic. Rather, developmentally appropriate practice, whether in a preschool or a primary classroom, should respond to the natural curiosity of young children, reaffirm a sense of self, promote positive dispositions towards learning, and help build increasingly complex skills in the use of language, problem solving, and cooperation.

Parent Involvement. One hallmark of any successful early childhood program is the degree to which it involves parents. Such involvement should not stop when children reach the schoolhouse door. Good schools for young children welcome family members in ways that go well beyond traditional parent activities such as fundraising and annual parent-teacher conferences. Ongoing com-

munication between parents and teachers has become increasingly important. Parents can be involved as decision makers, volunteers, and staff. They can participate in parent education and support groups, be encouraged to observe the classroom, and, in general, take a more active role in their child's education both at school and at home.

Schools also need to respond to the diversity among families. Parent activities need to be responsive to the language and culture of the family and be tailored to meet specific needs of teen parents, single parents, working parents, blended families, and families with special service needs. Given the increasing number of working parents with young children, employers can be supportive of parent involvement by providing release time for parent participation and by initiating policies that support work and family life.

Supportive services. Effective early childhood programs, particularly those for low-income families, need to respond to the comprehensive needs of children and families for health care, child care, and other family supports. Traditionally, schools have not played a role in ensuring that such services are provided. Yet there is a growing recognition that schools are the natural hub for child and family services. New relationships between school and other health and human service providers are emerging as comprehensive services are integrated into public education.

Supportive services that include school and parent representation promote collaborative processes and community development. The uniting of school and community resources and concerns, and the clear recognition of the fact that the school is embedded in its community, sustain healthy environments and contribute greatly to continuity for children and families.

Conclusion

Traditional notions of transition, which focus on bridging the gaps between different types of early childhood programs, are changing. Because we now know that young children learn in similar ways throughout the early years, all programs in the community should adhere to developmentally appropriate principles from infancy through the primary grades. In addition, parent involvement, family support, and linkages to health services, which often characterize preschool programs, should continue into the early years of elementary school. It is through the continuity of such services, in and out of the classroom, that we will eventually move beyond a concern for transition and ensure continuous and effective services throughout the early years.

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Final Report of the National Transition Study

TRANSITIONS TO KINDERGARTEN IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Final Report to the Office of Policy and Planning,
U. S. Department of Education, Contract No. LC88089001
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Preface

In 1988 the U.S. Department of Education launched two studies to investigate programmatic efforts in public schools that may be effective in retaining the benefits achieved by quality preschool programs serving disadvantaged children. This report describes the results of the study that investigated transition activities provided by schools to enhance the continuity experienced by children as they make the transition into kindergarten from their preschool, day care, home, or other previous experience. The second study examined promising parent education programs and is available as a separate report (Goodson, Swartz, & Millsap, 1991).

This report begins in Chapter I with background information including definitions of terms, statement of the study's purpose, and an overview of the methodology. The methodology section includes a summary of the demographics of the districts and schools surveyed.

Chapter II reports extensive information on kindergarten programs, giving the first national profile of kindergarten programs based on a nationally representative sample of public schools. The chapter also includes data on the prekindergarten programs housed in these schools. The national findings from the surveys are supplemented with illustrations from our site visits. Chapter II can be thought of as describing the school context in which the transition activities occur.

In Chapter III we turn to a description of school transition activities, again supplementing survey findings with more indepth information from the schools participating in the site visits. Chapter IV assesses factors that are associated with, and perhaps influence, the extent or prevalence of transition activities and discusses ways these activities can potentially enhance the degree of continuity experienced by children.

Finally, Chapter V presents our conclusions and suggests implications of these findings for early childhood policy and practice. Recommendations for further research are also included.

Several appendices provide important additional information: Appendix A includes a review of recent related research. Appendix B contains brief 3- to 4-page descriptions of the context and transition activities of each of the eight indepth sites. Appendix C gives details of the sampling and study methodologies. The district and school surveys used to collect our data are reproduced in Appendices D and E, with the national means and sample sizes given for each survey item. Technical details for some of the more complex analyses are given in Appendix F.

All differences between groups described in the text refer to statistically significant differences, unless otherwise indicated. Effects of poverty and size were analyzed using analysis of variance for continuous variables and chi-square for dichotomous variables. All analyses were conducted using the weighted data (see Appendix C) to account for the fact that schools appear in the sample with different probabilities depending on their sampling strata.

CHAPTER I: PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction
The Importance of the Preschool-to-Kindergarten Transition
The Challenge of Studying Transition
Research Relevant to the Study of Transition
Components of Transition
Study Methodologies
Descriptions of the Survey and Site Visit Samples

I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Issues in Transition: Three Children Begin School

Angela entered a full-day kindergarten program in a moderate-poverty school. She had no prekindergarten program experience. She and her mother attended the kindergarten orientation held the previous spring, and Angela was eager to go to school. Because Angela was so verbal and always asking questions, her mother was convinced that she was "ready." Besides, parents were assured that the only requirement was age, and Angela would be 5 a month after entering kindergarten. About half of the children in Angela's kindergarten had attended preschool while the other half were, like Angela, coming from home. Separation from her mother was extremely difficult for Angela, and she cried inconsolably several times during the day, sometimes because she missed her mother, other times because she was hungry but was told it was not time to eat. She became irritable and drowsy during the late morning when she typically napped at home. She demanded teacher attention by yelling or by pulling on the teacher's clothing when the teacher was busy with other children. Angela had no experience with scissors, crayons, or pencils and little with books. She did not have a "school sense" about waiting her turn or sitting in her seat and showed little readiness for the formal kindergarten curriculum. While it was only the first month of school, the teacher strongly suspected that Angela would not pass the district's end-of-year test and would spend two years in kindergarten.

Following a year in Head Start, Daniel entered the full-day kindergarten that is housed in the same building. The school principal describes her kindergarten as "academically focused," with emphasis on basic skills in a predominantly teacher-directed environment. Daniel knew his letters, numbers, and colors, could cut and write his name, and passed the kindergarten readiness test with flying colors. In Head Start, with teachers and parent volunteers, there were always many adults in the room. Someone was available to intervene before an altercation occurred and redirect Daniel's boundless energy in more constructive ways. To Daniel's kindergarten teacher, however, he was a fighter and troublemaker. He was a very curious, self-directed child with definite interests and preferences. He would wander off to the block area when he should have been doing his seatwork and cried when brought back to his seat. At other times he sang to himself while working, which the teacher found disruptive. Daniel resisted resting after lunch, then fell apart an hour before school ended. His mother had volunteered regularly in Head Start, but her offer to help in kindergarten was discouraged; the teacher feared Daniel might be even more uncontrollable with his mother present. The Head Start teachers had written a detailed report about Daniel's learning style and how to engage him. The kindergarten teacher, however, had not read the report as she wanted to make her own judgments about children without being prejudiced by other teachers' opinions. Daniel had loved Head Start and threatened the kindergarten teacher that unless school got better soon, he would "pack up his cubby and move back to Head Start."

After a year in a highly developmental, private preschool, Sarah entered kindergarten in a suburban elementary school in a middle-class neighborhood. Both the preschool and kindergarten programs were morning programs. Sarah and her family visited the kindergarten program in the spring prior to kindergarten entry. Kindergarten children were phased in during the first week to help children adjust to the larger group. Sarah's mother volunteered regularly both in preschool and kindergarten and attended several of the educational workshops for parents. Sarah began to read in preschool using a whole language approach and these skills were continued in kindergarten where a similar approach was used. Sarah had several bathroom "accidents" during the first few weeks of school, and her kindergarten teacher was concerned about Sarah's adjustment. Sarah's mother was also baffled by this new behavior. At the end of September each year, all community preschool and kindergarten teachers meet to discuss any adjustment problems children may be having and plan their joint inservice meetings for the year. At this meeting, Sarah's kindergarten teacher discussed Sarah's difficulty. The problem was not unfamiliar to the preschool teacher, who reminded the kindergarten teacher that the classroom structure of the two programs was different and might be responsible for the problem. In kindergarten, children had to leave the classroom and travel down the hall alone to a bathroom that is shared by older children. By calling upon one of the parent volunteers or having another child accompany Sarah to the bathroom, what may have become a more serious problem was quickly solved.

Application to the Present Study

These composite cases are hypothetical, but the events they describe are real. They illustrate many of the factors that may influence the quality of children's transition to kindergarten. Influences range from simple structural considerations, such as location of bathrooms or timing of snacks in kindergarten, to more complex issues such as pedagogical inconsistency between programs, attitudes toward parents, and the effects of poverty on programs. This study of transition considers these multiple school circumstances and influences, as well as the diversity of children served.

Purpose of the Study

Quality preschool programs can have important long-term benefits for disadvantaged children, but they do not always do so, nor do their benefits necessarily endure. One way to enhance the benefits of early childhood programs may be for schools to provide programs and services that smooth the discontinuities children frequently experience when making the transition from preschool or home into kindergarten. This study describes such programs and services in the public schools and provides a profile of the kinds of transition activities that currently exist in American schools, along with the contexts in which they occur. This study does not, however, examine the impact of these transition activities on children's later school achievement. Investigation of this important question is left to future research.

The overall purpose of the transition study is to learn more about the ways in which today's public schools are helping children make the transition into kindergarten. Specifically, the following questions guide this inquiry:

- What are the characteristics of prekindergarten programs in public schools?
- What are the characteristics of kindergarten programs?
- To what degree are children perceived to have difficulty in the transition from preschool to kindergarten?
- What is the context of the kindergarten program and of transition activities?
- To what degree does the district or school have an organized approach for providing transition activities?
- What are the major influences on school transition activities?

The first four questions are answered in Chapter II; Chapter III addresses the fifth question; and the question on influences is dealt with in Chapter IV of this report.

At a time of unprecedented collaboration between the Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS), there is increased interest in transition. The new Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Program funded by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), the Head Start-school partnerships initiative jointly sponsored by HHS and ED, and efforts underway by the regional educational laboratories (also with joint ED and HHS funding) are all raising public consciousness about transition. It is hoped that the results of this study will guide elementary schools and preschools as they develop, implement, or improve transition activities.

Defining Continuity and Transition

Although specifically studying transition, this study is also necessarily concerned with the degree of continuity or discontinuity that children experience as they enter the new world of formal schooling. **Continuity and discontinuity refer to the experience children have as they move from one environment to another.** If the two environments are similar or compatible, there is continuity of experience. The behaviors children learn in the first setting will be appropriate in the second, and adults will respond to children in the second setting in ways that are consistent with the expectations established in the first.

If the two environments are different or incompatible, children may experience discontinuity as they go from one to the other. Children may suddenly find that established ways of responding are no longer appropriate or that their experiences have not prepared them for knowing how to behave in the new environment.

In situations where the two settings are different, it is possible to reduce the discontinuity experienced by children through additional experiences that prepare the child for the new situation. Thus, when two settings are similar, children make a smooth transition with few adjustment difficulties; when the

two settings are different, continuity can be created. **For purposes of this study, transition refers to those activities initiated by schools or preschools to bridge the gap between the preschool and kindergarten experiences.** This understanding of continuity-discontinuity suggests a two-pronged approach for studying the phenomenon.

In order to investigate the nature and degree of continuity experienced by children as they enter kindergarten, we need both (a) to compare the characteristics of their preschool and kindergarten environments and (b) to analyze any activities provided by the preschool and kindergarten programs that are designed to assist with the transition. The first analysis (a) assesses the degree of continuity; the second (b) examines transition activities. This study focuses on the latter, but we also take important strides toward analyzing the issue of continuity.

There is no inherent value in continuity for its own sake. Some discontinuity of experience is a normal part of maturation. Children learn from new experiences, and over time learn that expectations vary in different settings. The concern here is that transitions for young children may be overly abrupt and that children may go from a situation that is appropriate for their age and developmental levels to one that is not. Transitions, therefore, cannot be studied without reference to the types of programs involved.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Within the early childhood education community, a strong consensus has emerged around the report, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987). This document, which is based on research about how young children learn, forms the basis for professional accreditation of early childhood programs. Although difficult to summarize briefly, the term "developmentally appropriate" practice is used to describe an approach to early childhood education that builds on each child's abilities and interests through active exploratory learning, small-group work, and opportunities for children to select their learning activities from a variety of choices. In a developmentally appropriate classroom, the teacher primarily acts as a guide or facilitator of learning.

Developmentally appropriate practice is generally contrasted with an "academic" approach in which teachers directly instruct children, predominantly in large groups, and rely on paper-and-pencil activities such as worksheets and flashcards. In academic-style classrooms, teachers encourage children to master isolated facts and skills in a prescribed order. When we use the terms "developmentally appropriate" and "academic" in this report, we refer to these contrasting approaches, as they are used in the literature. At the same time, we recognize that, in practice, it may be rare to find classrooms that clearly adhere to one approach or the other.

The Importance of the Preschool-to-Kindergarten Transition

Changing Nature of Kindergarten

Much of the concern about the transition from preschool to kindergarten is brought about by changes in the nature of kindergarten, as documented in a number of studies. Karweit (1988) summarized changes in kindergarten programs over the last 20 years: enrollment has expanded; the curriculum has become more academic; the students are older; and the days are getting longer. Hitz and Wright (1988) and Freeman and Hatch (1989) have also found increased emphasis on academic skill development in kindergarten.

Other indications of this trend include:

- kindergarten teachers experiencing pressure to have children learn more of the basic skills;
- states requiring children to pass a test to "graduate" from kindergarten into first grade;
- parents desiring more reading and math in kindergarten (71% of them, according to a survey by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Perrone, 1988);
- publishers producing easy-to-use work sheets for teachers, some of whom have little formal training in early childhood education and may use these materials in a developmentally inappropriate way;
- extra year classes for children deemed not ready for kindergarten or first grade.

Those who take a developmental approach to learning believe that an academic style of instruction is incompatible with the way in which young children learn. As evidence continues to mount that public school kindergartens are becoming more and more academic, there is increased concern with how young children will adjust to these academic demands. Because children entering kindergarten frequently face a classroom and school situation that is qualitatively different from their preschool experience, there is fear that the differences may disrupt the learning and development process.

Developmental Agenda of 4- and 5-Year-Olds

Another reason for focusing on this transition point is that children enter kindergarten with tremendous diversity in their physical skills, social and emotional maturity, and intellectual abilities. Children entering kindergarten display a range of skill levels within a common developmental agenda. This agenda includes the growth of self-awareness and self-concept; the learning of gender roles; the development of peer relations; the formation of simple symbolic concepts and language development; the mastery of increasingly complex physical skills; the acceptance of extended separation from parents; increased attention span; development of self-control; and learning independent self-help skills. Taken as a whole this agenda represents a tremendous set of tasks to be accomplished in a very short time. It is no surprise then that the adjustment to the kindergarten setting is not only frequently difficult for children but critical for future school success.

The Challenge of Studying Transition

A study of transition must encompass much more than a cataloging of discrete events or activities; it involves an analysis of the range of organizational and institutional philosophies, intentions, and activities related to the transition period. Discrete activities may not be sufficient to create continuity. For example, a parent night or an afternoon visit to kindergarten, designed to ease entry to the new setting, have relatively little importance in the overall transition picture if institutions are operating with different philosophies about what constitute the important classroom experiences for 5-year-olds. Thus, we have tried to assess school decisionmakers' beliefs and understandings as well as to describe the dimensions of preschool and elementary school programs.

Yet there are limits to this study as well. Although we have a nationally representative sample of schools, our data on preschool practices come only from school-based programs. We recognize that features of homes, day care centers, family day care, and other preschool programs affect the degree of continuity children experience, but these are not the focus of this study. It is recognized that children who have not been in formal prekindergarten programs bring different experiences to their school setting. We also acknowledge that classroom teachers address transition issues on a daily basis as they help children adjust to the classroom routines and expectations. These subtle day-to-day activities are important and should be examined in future studies that can go beyond the methodologies of this one.

The transition study is timely. It occurs at a time when the White House and the National Governors' Association have announced six education goals, the first of which is to ensure that young children will succeed in school (National Governors' Association, 1990). Based on growing evidence that preschools can benefit disadvantaged children, public schools are expanding their involvement in prekindergarten programming. 1990 legislation has resulted in a new demonstration program that is creating Head Start-public school collaborations for implementing transition activities. Recently, concern about the high school dropout problem has focused educators' attention on the early school experiences of at-risk youth and raised questions about practices such as retention and extra-year programs. Professional groups (e.g., National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 1990; National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 1988) recognize the value of providing transition activities to promote continuity and are advocating increased cooperation and coordination between preschool and kindergarten, higher levels of parent involvement, and curriculum alternatives to retention and extra-year programs. These events present a real opportunity for elementary schools to build upon the benefits of preschool and to further enhance the early educational experience of disadvantaged children.

Research Relevant to the Study of Transition

There has been little research on the transition between preschool and elementary school. There has been extensive research, however, on a multitude of programs for disadvantaged children -- preschool education, compensatory education, home-based approaches, day care, parent and family education, Head Start, Follow Through, bilingual education, migrant education, and so forth. Not all findings are congruent, but many studies find at least short-term effects and there is accumulating evidence of long-term benefits from some efforts, such as comprehensive, intensive preschool programs for disadvantaged children.

In defining program elements to study in relation to the transition into kindergarten, we have relied on experience from a number of areas: (a) research on effective preschool programs, (b) research on effective elementary school programs, (c) evidence about the elements of quality programs at both the elementary and preschool levels, and (d) experience from the few existing systematic efforts to create and study preschool-kindergarten transition. A review of this research is presented in Appendix A.

Components of Transition

Critical Ingredients of Transition

We know, with a great deal of certainty, the general characteristics of quality preschool programs (Griswold, Cotton, & Hansen, n.d.; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1984; Schweinhart, 1988). Similarly, the results of effective schools and instructional strategies research are now accepted as broad guidelines for implementing quality elementary school programs (e.g., Connecticut State Department of Education, 1984; Edmunds, 1979; Knapp & Turnbull, 1990). The challenge of this study was to build on these sources of knowledge in order to describe the characteristics of current transition efforts and to begin to understand the elements of continuity that may be important in young children's development.

Our review of the literature suggests three critical ingredients of transition processes. There must be (a) preschool programs that have the potential for producing benefits that are worth retaining, (b) an effective elementary school program, and (c) an effective transfer process -- activities and events (over and above the preschool and school programs) that are designed to overcome the discontinuities that may disrupt children's learning and development. This study reports data on all three of these ingredients.

Efforts to ease children's transition into kindergarten, particularly for disadvantaged children, make intuitive sense and are gaining support in the

field (ACYF, 1991; NAESP, 1990; NASBE, 1988). Yet, there is little research documenting the value of continuity or the effectiveness of transition activities for children's later school success. As the field of early education moves toward supporting greater public school involvement in preschool education, increased coordination and collaboration between public schools and preschools, and more parent involvement at both levels, studies examining the effectiveness of various transition efforts will be helpful and necessary.

Prior to such efforts, however, baseline data describing the present state of practice are needed. This study presents such data. At a time of rapid change in early education, such baseline information is vital for evaluating changes and guiding responsible public policy for all children.

Study Methodologies

The study was designed to get information on transition activities through nationwide surveys, supplemented with indepth information from eight schools at which the research team witnessed transition activities first-hand. This section summarizes the methods used for the surveys and site visits:

- district survey
- school survey
- site visits

This discussion is followed by descriptions of each of the samples. Details of these procedures and samples are provided in Appendix C.

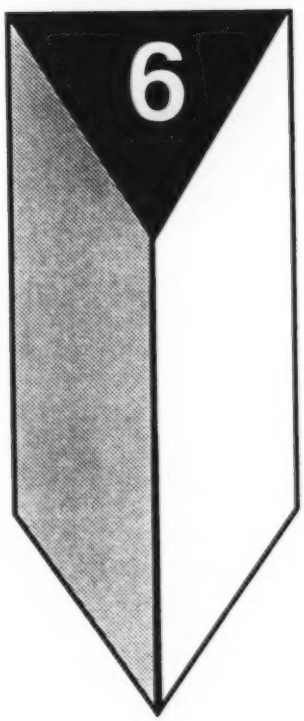
Survey Methods

A stratified random sample of 1,003 public school districts containing kindergartens was selected with high-poverty-level districts and districts with large enrollments oversampled. The sample was stratified by size and poverty level (for both the district and school samples). All responses were analyzed by district and school size and poverty level because these factors are often related to educational practice.

There is considerable evidence that both district and school size are significant variables in influencing student achievement (e.g., Eberts, Kehoe, & Stone, 1984; Howley, 1989; Walberg & Fowler, 1987). Explanations offered in the literature for the generally positive effect of smaller schools or districts include possible differences in school climate, program diversity, access to resources, parental participation, staff interaction, and allocation of funds (Fowler & Walberg, 1991).

District and school poverty levels have also been shown to relate to student achievement and resources allocation. In their national assessment of Chapter 1 programs, Kennedy, Jung, and Orland (1986) found that school achievement of all students (not only the ones from low-income families)

Suggested Readings



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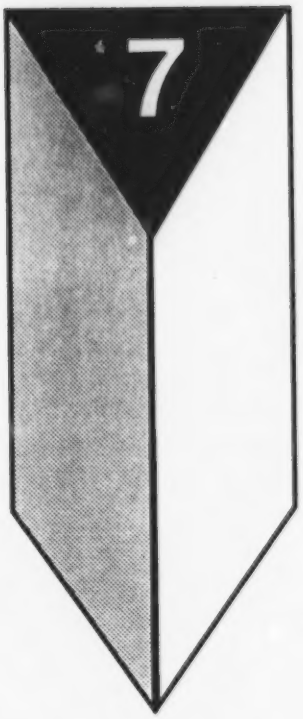

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These research-based publications focus on issues of present relevance and importance in education and are developed with input from educators throughout the Southeast. Each document is a practical guidebook that offers information, resources, descriptions of exemplary programs, and contacts for additional information. See back for prices.

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